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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: DEC/JAN REFUGEE UPDATE: PRESIDENT MAKAPA WANTS NO
MORE BURUNDIAN REFUGEES

1. Summary. At a January 14 joint UNHCR-WFP donor briefing, the UNHCR Country Director said he was concerned about Tanzanian President Mkapa's recent remarks about not granting asylum to any additional Burundian refugees. The UNHCR also noted that only small numbers of Burundian were repatriating, that Tanzanian government officials continued to deny Burundians first asylum and sometimes deported them. The UNHCR also outlined its plans to facilitate return of Congolese refugees. The WFP Deputy Director provided information about pipeline shortfalls in February. End Summary.

BY THE NUMBERS: REFUGEE HOLDING STEADY AROUND 400,000

2. As of January 15, the UNHCR assisted 404,000 refugees in Tanzania, with the breakdown as follows:

--245,000 Burundians
--153,500 Congolese
----3,000 Somalis
----2,000 Other

PRESIDENT SAYS NO MORE BURUNDIAN WILL BE ALLOWED IN

3. The UNHCR Country Director, Chrys Ache, expressed concern about Presidential Mkapa's public statement in late December that Tanzania would accept no new arrivals if the political situation in Burundi worsened. The UNHCR formally expressed concern about Mkapa's remarks to the Minister of Home Affairs. Home Affairs Minister Mapuri said the President's remarks stemmed from frustrations at the political gridlock in Burundi and did not signal a refugee policy change. Ache reiterated that the President's remarks could give political cover for local governmental authorities to deny asylum to Burundian refugees. Ache also noted that President Mkapa had made similar remarks January 7 at his annual New Year's sherry party for the diplomatic corps.

TRIPARTITE ON CONGOLESE RETURN

4. A tripartite session for the UNHCR, and the governments of the Democratic Republic of Congo and Tanzania was set for January 20 in Dar es Salaam to discuss repatriation of Congolese refugees in Tanzania. UNHCR Country Director Ache said this first meeting would establish a tripartite committee, which would develop plans to facilitate the repatriation of Congolese refugees in Tanzania. Ache said that the Congolese refugees had repeatedly expressed a desire to return, and that the numbers of returnees had increased. For this reason, the UNHCR was establishing a field presence in South Kivu.

FEW BURUNDIANS REPATRIATE

5. In calendar year 2004, 82,930 Burundian refugees repatriated, but that pace of repatriation has dropped dramatically since September. In December only 2,064 Burundians repatriated. The UNHCR Country Director attributed the decline to the political uncertainty in Burundi, as well as to the food insecurity in the refugees' home provinces. The Burundian Government recently declared famine in two provinces, Muyinga and Kirundo. Muyinga province, in particular, is a high return area for refugees.

57 NEW ARRIVALS: MORE ASYLUM SEEKERS DENIED REFUGEE STATUS

6. The UNHCR Country Director said there were 57 new arrivals in December. He also noted there continued to be

scattered reports of denial of first asylum and reports of forced deportations of refugees found outside the camps. The UNHCR has sought to participate, as mandated, in procedures to screen asylum seekers, but with mixed results. While Tanzanian Government Official sometimes involve UNHCR staff in asylum screening procedures, they do not present official notifications to UNHCR offices but instead telephone local UNHCR staff. The UNHCR is currently developing guidelines on joint screening with Ministry of Home Affairs.

CRIME SPIKING IN CONGOLESE REFUGEE-HOSTING DISTRICT

17. After summer crime waves in the Northern refugee-hosting district of Ngara, there is now a crime wave further south, in the Kigoma region. While it is rumored that these are ethnic/politically-motivated criminals from the DRC, the UNHCR Director noted that both locals and refugees were targeted in robbery attempts. The killing of a refugee woman in Lugufu camp is under investigation.

PIPELINE UPDATE

18. World Food Program Deputy Director Giancarlo Stopponi said that problems with the food pipeline persisted. Although donors have made several large new pledges, food will not arrive in time to forestall rations cuts. Refugee rations are still reduced by roughly 20 percent. In February, rations for two commodities will be reduced. The Tanzanian Government has made an unprecedented offer to donate salt to refugees to offset the shortfalls.

IMPLEMENTING JOINT WFP/UNHCR RECOMMENDATIONS

19. The UNHCR program officer, Mary Jane Popovitich, said the UNHCR has been following through on the joint WFP/UNHCR mission recommendations. The UNHCR will increase soap rations in February, and also distribute buckets during the 1st half of this year. UNHCR still has difficulty clearing sanitary materials through Tanzanian customs. Problems also persist in distributing firewood to the most vulnerable refugees.

110. Comment. Burundian refugee's status is precarious in Tanzania. Several officials, from the President down to local officials, have pointedly emphasized that the time is right now for Burundians to return and that Tanzania is growing weary of hosting them indefinitely. End Comment.
STILLMAN